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ABSTRACT

Teacher educators have become increasingly interested in the beliefs preservice teachers bring to their undergraduate methods courses. S. Lortie (1975) posited that the major influence in shaping future teachers' conceptions of teaching is their previous years of experience as students. A study of students in preservice reading methods courses investigated the following questions: (1) What are preservice teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning? (2) What changes occur in preservice teachers' beliefs during their first literacy methods course? and (3) To what do preservice teachers attribute changes in beliefs during their first literacy methods course? Participants were selected from two sections of a methods course at a small southwestern university. A self-report questionnaire with open-ended questions was administered at three points during the semester. Of the 40 participants, 10 chose to respond to all three questionnaires; they constituted the core of the study. Results showed preservice teachers continuing to think of teaching as being skills oriented. For instance, asked how they would teach reading, three said they would use objects from the environment; three would teach the alphabet; two would read to students; and one would put students in groups. Of these 10, 6 showed changes in their beliefs after the methods course. These changes, however, tended to be largely at the knowledge level. The preservice teachers indicated that they would use new approaches and materials in traditional ways. (Contains 15 references.) (TB)

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CHANGE PROCESS IN PRESERVICE TEACHERS BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING DURING A LITERACY METHODS COURSE

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CHANGE PROCESS IN PRESERVICE TEACHERS BELIEFS ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING DURING A LITERACY METHODS COURSE

Rationale

Teacher training institutions have been rethinking the structure and content of methods courses, practicums, observation experiences, and student teaching experiences provided to improve the training of preservice teachers (Clark and Peterson, 1986). Research with preservice teachers has focused on three areas: students and how they learn, teachers and teaching practices, and teacher beliefs.

Researchers believe that teacher thinking and teacher behavior are guided by an organized set of beliefs or theories which often are implicit. Educational methods courses have the dual responsibility of acquainting teacher candidates with current practices in schools and preparing them for the future restructuring of education (Goodlad, 1990). Before teacher educators can effectively influence teaching practices, they need to understand the relationship between teachers' theories, both explicit and implicit, and their classroom behaviors. Researchers disagree over the impact of methods courses on preservice teachers beliefs about teaching (Ferguson and Womack, 1993). Some researchers have found that methods courses have little or no impact on preconceptions

about teaching, that students leave methods courses with the same belief systems they held when they entered. Other researchers have found that methods courses do impact on belief systems (Alverman, 1981, Grossman and Richert, 1988). Since belief systems impact classroom practices, teacher educators are interested in the ways methods courses can impact teacher beliefs (Hollingsworth, 1989).

Teacher educators have become increasingly interested in the beliefs preservice teachers bring to their undergraduate methods courses (Brosseau, Book, & Byers, 1988 and Wham, 1993). Lortie (1975) posited that the major influence in shaping future teachers' conceptions of teaching is their previous years of experience as students in classrooms with past teachers as their models, both positive and negative. Harste and Burke (1977) suggested that teachers' beliefs and theories would emerge in classroom practice as instructional behaviors, which impact on classroom goals, procedures and materials, and interaction patterns with students. They further hypothesized that teachers made decisions about reading instruction based on their own beliefs about teaching and learning. These theoretical orientations to teaching make up preservice teachers' knowledge and belief systems which control expectations of student learning, daily planning and decision making. Deep philosophical principles, constructed from past experiences of observations in classrooms as pupils, guide current teachers-in-training in making instructional decisions (Harste and Burke). Other researchers have verified the importance of teacher beliefs and their impact on classroom practices (Pajares, 1992).

One approach to discovering the theoretical orientation of preservice teachers taken by some researchers has been through the use of self-report measures (Clark and Peterson). Self-report measures, i.e., journals and other artifacts created during methods courses, and records of classroom discussion, collect valid types of data for identifying the foundation upon which students construct beliefs about teaching and learning.

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are preservice teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning?
2. What changes occur in preservice teachers' beliefs during their first literacy methods course?
3. To what do preservice teachers attribute changes in beliefs during their first literacy methods course?

Methodology

The research was conducted in a small southwestern university. Participants were solicited from two sections of a first methods course in reading, consisting of 40 students in each section. Some students were enrolled in other education courses. A self-report questionnaire, consisting of open-ended questions addressing beliefs about teaching and learning, was administered to participants at the beginning of the semester, at mid-semester, and at the end of the semester. The questionnaire, had been previously pilot tested by other researchers (Sampson and Linek, 1994). Other artifacts of the course

were collected, including autobiographies of students' public school experiences, course syllabus, instructors notes from class discussions, and students' journals. The data was compiled with the aid of Ethnograph (Siedel, Kjolseth, and Seymour, 1988), categories were identified, and analyzed according to the constant comparative method of analysis as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

A total of 34 participants ranged in age from 19 to 43 years of age, with 4 males and 30 females. A total of 27 participants responded to the first questionnaire, 34 wrote responses to the second questionnaire, and 25 persons responded to the final administration of the questionnaire. Of these total participants, 10 chose to respond to all three administrations of the questionnaire. This study focuses on these core respondents.

Of these 10 participants, 8 were female and the remaining 2 male. They ranged in age from 20 to 43 years, with a mode and median of 26, and a mean of 25.9.

According to analysis of the autiobiographies, all students experienced traditional educational programs, where they were grouped by ability during the primary years, with approximately half stating they had learned to read from a phonetic program. All recall teacher-centered classrooms, with worksheets as the predominant type of hand-in activity.

Results

The reporting of results will consist of two parts. Individual questions will be analyzed, with examples of responses listed. Summary statements will be made for the results from those questions. Common results which crossed lines of individual questions

will be discussed in a second division. Tables have been inserted where they could summarize results.

Analysis of the Results of Individual Questions

From an analysis of the responses to the question, "What is a good reader? Why do you say that?", the following typical statements were received from the first administration of the questionnaire: "A good reader is someone who understands what they have read." "A good reader is someone who understands what they are reading." Standard responses from the second administration of the questionnaire were: "One who enjoys and comprehends what is read." "A good reader is someone who reads and understand what he/she is reading..." "One who can comprehend what they are reading at whatever level they may be on". Typical responses on the third administration of the questionnaire were: "Someone who comprehends what they read." "Someone who can read and recognize words easily, but comprehends what they read." Consistently, preservice teachers responses emphasized the importance of meaning in reading.

Frequency of use of terms 'Understand' and 'Comprehend'

Administration	Understand	Comprehend	Used Both Terms
Pre-Semester	5	2	2
Mid-Semester	5	3	1
Post-Semester	5	4	1

Table 1: Frequencies of use of terms

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Responses to an inquiry about what preservice teachers thought students needed to know about letter/sound relationships were analyzed. From the first administration of the questionnaire come these responses: "Students need to know the sound each letter makes in order to read. It also helps the student to figure out long words they haven't seen before." "Students need to know the relationship between letters and sound. They need to know that letters make certain sounds. Some letters make sounds which are the same as other letters." "Students need to understand how letters sound and how that sound relates to how words are pronounced." During the second administration of the questionnaire, these responses were recorded: "I think phonics are important in learning to read and spell" "Students should be able to recognize that sounds go with certain letters to form words." "Students need to know how different letters make different sounds." "They need to know when a certain letter is pronounced silent or not" During the third administration, these responses were samples of the type received: "You need to make associations with letters and sounds to sound out words." "Certain letters have certain sound and it is vital to know these sounds if one is to be literate." Respondents consistently stated the importance of knowing about letter/sound relationships.

Another question analyzed in this study asked preservice teachers how to teach sound/letter relationships. In the first administration , the following were typical responses: "I would introduce a letter then words that begin with that letter." "I would teach it by showing the particular letter then sounding it our together with the class." "I would make neat reminder tricks." "I would teach this by having the kids study to have

spelling bees." "I would teach a child sounds and letters by reading, reading, reading, and repetition." During the second administration, the following responses were read: "I would have a letter strip on my wall and I would go to each letter with the class and go over what sound each makes." "I might use charts..." " I would teach through a reading program or through a Sing-Spell-Read-and-Write Program..." "I would probably teach that through the use of phonics." "I would teach this through being a good example--speaking clearly and teaching them to speak clearly." Typical examples of responses to the third administration of the questionnaire were: "I would have letter days." "Practice saying the sounds out loud and give examples of words using the letter." "I would teach this by showing them (using different examples) through books, songs, etc." "Using these in a song is one way to teach it, but you would have to follow up with some application processes; lots [sic] of reading stories together." "I could make flash cards of several different combinations of vowel and consonant sounds (flash cards would contain words with these sounds). Reading aloud to students is also important so they can hear what is read and see it as well." Preservice teachers showed an increase in awareness of materials available for teaching letter/sound relationships

Number of Teaching Materials Identified

Administration	Pre-Semester	Mid-Semester	Post-Semester
No. of Materials	10	16	24

Table 2: Number of Different Types of Teaching Materials Mentioned as Useful

For Teaching Letter/Sound Relationships

In response to the question asking how they would teach beginning readers to read, typical responses from the first administration of the instrument were as follows: "I would use word/object association. i.e. I would write book on the board and then have students get out their books." "Introduce the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they make to each child." "To teach a beginning reader to read I would go over the simple style of reading like 'Watch Mary run'" "I would teach the reader to go slow and take their time." "The alphabet, vowels, and consonants. Then words and then sentences." Responses from the second administration included: "I would let each student bring in a word on a piece of paper or wrapper that they could read and let them read it to the class to build confidence." 4 respondents mentioned reading things they are familiar with or used the term environmental print, 3 responded with phonics or letters, words, and sentences, and the remaining with a variety of responses. Typical responses from the third set of responses were: "I would teach them to read things they see everyday..." "Teach them the letters of the alphabet and how they sound." Respondents made few changes in response to this question over three administrations of the questionnaire.

Summary of Responses to Question of How to Teach Beginning Readers

First Administration	**Second Administration**	**Third Administration**
word-object association	Specific example of word-object assoc.	environmental print
alphabet	small words	alphabet
Big Books	letters	environmental print
read	read	read
simple words	basics	no response
read slowly	read slowly	environmental print
phonics	books	Big Books
alphabet	alphabet	alphabet, phonics
alphabet	sounds	alphabet

Table 3: Table of Key Word Summary of Responses from Preservice Teachers to Question on How to Teach Beginning Readers

Another question dealt with whether vocabulary should be pre-taught. Typical examples from the first administration were: "Discuss the words and their meanings kids need to know what words mean ..." "I would have the children look up the words, write the definition and use the word in a sentence." Other persons wrote that they would use a song, make a game, pick words out of the passage that were important and teach the

meanings In the second administration, a greater variety of methods were written, such as write and guess, list and discuss, make cards, tell the students the meanings, pretest for prior knowledge and teach, use pictures and games, list, and preview. Sample statements were the following: "I would write the words on the board and let the students guess what each one means and then look it up and tell them the meaning to see how close they were." "I would tell the children what the words were and tell them the meaning." "I would use the words as part of my spelling list. Put them on the board go over each of them." Examples of responses from the final administration included: "Preteaching vocab. will make reading easier and less stressful." "I would make a word list before reading the passage and then pick those words out as we go and emphasize the meaning..." "Have picture from beginning to end ...and then have them read the passage." "I would let the students look up the words and then discuss the words." In summarizing the movement over the semester, students recorded more types and varieties of activities for highlighting and teaching vocabulary.

Preservice teachers were asked how they would organize their daily schedule as teachers, In informal discussion recorded in notes, students commented that they did not know how teachers' made scheduling decisions, one students commenting that "Didn't the school district or individual school set the schedule?" Some of the typical comments from students who did respond to this question were: "I would try to place children in groups where they are slightly challenged but capable of success for that level of content". "I would teach them at certain times of the day and I would try to interrelate each subject

with the others." "I would try to organize them so there would be a connection between each one. Use an 'across the curriculum' approach." "Reading would come first in the morning because of the concentration levels during the day, then math, science, social studies,(respectively)." "I would use morning time to teach essential elements because children are more focused in the morning. The afternoon could be used for other things, such as storytime, arts & crafts, etc. I would organize other subjects with breaks in between. Subjects should overlap and relate to one another. A smooth transition to next subject is imperative.". The last set of responses included the following examples: "Each subject will probably be given a certain amount of time, but I think I will try to vary my schedule somewhat to avoid predictability and boredom." " I would have my daily plan with time slots for each subject. But I would also have "emergency ideas": for example, children finish early, children need more time, the lesson just isn't working out then I will have a back-up plan." "I would first find out my schedule. Such as when they have Art, Music, Comp., Library, P.E. Then I would get with other teachers and see what time Reading and Math was and go from there. I would have a set time for all the above, but if the situation arose where I could integrate some subjects, I would take full advantage of this." " I would organize these subjects by the lessons that are to be taught on specific days. I would keep a file on every lesson I have taught throughout the year, filed weekly." "Having a filing system with all my material for the subjects. Even set up sub-divisions for all the different subject areas that can be taught." Respondents moved from not knowing how classrooms are organized to a broader interpretation of the words "organize and

manage," including a greater variety of teacher behaviors through the different adninistrations of the questionnaire.

In analyzing the question about preservice teachers attitudes toward reading and writing, these responses from the first administration were typical: "I love to read. I will read any book, magazine, or sign. I love to write letters but I hate diary writing. If I have to write a journal, or diary I usually write letters to myself." "I love to read and write if I don't feel pressured into doing so. I tend to panic and rush through projects if I am pressured." I see reading as the most valuable asset to children's education." This student, as did 16 others in this set, commented in a very general way about reading, without commenting about writing. One student responded: "Personally I'm not fond of reading or writing sometimes, If I'm reading or writing in a subject area I am familiar with, then I enjoy read and writing." Another example: "I love to read and I read a lot in my spare time. I do not do much creative writing due to the fact that I do not usually feel very creative. I do like to write papers--such as research papers."

The final question analyzed in this study asked how students felt about teaching. "Right now I am unsure of myself and scared but everyday I learn something new and helpful." This was typical of the uncertain feelings of 8 of the respondents. "I think that teaching children to read and write is very important because those skills are the basic on which other skills are built on. I feel this way because reading and writing skills are necessary if one is to succeed." I'm apprehensive about teaching reading and writing. These are very important skills and the way I teach can have a wonderful effect or a

horrible one. I'm just a little nervous about students learning from what I teach. Will I be good enough to help them learn?" In subsequent administrations of the questionnaire, these responses were noted: "This class has help-helped me learn how to make a class more interesting and meaning-centered. I now see teaching as a fun challenge instead." I"Yes, at the beginning, I felt sort of threatened by the thought of "having to" {sic} teach..." Across the administration of the questionnaire, participants moved from fearful to more confident.

Analyzing Across Questions for Common Themes

In analyzing across questions, several common categories emerged repeatedly. One category that began to emerge was the importance of the affective domain. Responses reflecting the affective domain in the were first administration were the following: "I have decided to use those type books and bring in items kids like because this would be interesting to students" "I wouldn't rush them." If the student can't flow with it they may loose interest. "From participants during the second administration of the instrument: "I think a good reader is someone who understands what they have read and enjoys it." "...Because this would be interesting to the students." "I would do this because kids are more willing to read what they think is interesting." "I would let the students stand up one at a time and read their favorite entry." "I could use students work to create books an such that the students will feel proud of and be able to read..."I think

children learn faster when they're having fun." Responses in this category which appeared in the third administration of the questionnaire were the following: "Success and feeling of accomplishment still is very important." : "A person who enjoys reading and can comprehend reading material easily." "...How to make learning a fun task instead of boring." Respondents showed increased awareness of the importance of the affective domain.

Another sample response demonstrated the affect of observations in classrooms or in their personal experiences with children on the preservice teachers beliefs. "One who can understand what they're reading. I noticed while observing that some students could make out individual words but couldn't follow the story line. Others were simply repeating classmates during oral reading." "From experience with my daughter in 1st grade, I can see that seeing the words over and over again and sounding them out each time has help her very much." During the second administration, these personal observations were recorded: "I chose these materials after seeing my 1st grade daughter this year. She started out with these things, and she has really taken off. She can now choose a book and read it almost all the way through by herself." Of the ten participants on which this study focused, 2 included personal experiences.

Another common thread running through the parts of questions when participants were asked for reasons for their responses, were reasons classified as "ultimate truth", assumptions on the part of respondents that statements made were known, accepted "truth", understood by everyone, with no source for the statement. Examples from the

first administration of the questionnaire read as follows: "I say this because anyone can read a book, but you do not understand what you are reading then it is doing you no good." "I feel this way because reading is so important and if the student can't flow with it they may loose interest." "Because they have to have these essential in order to be able to read." "This would give the word meaning to the student." "Comprehending what the story says is most important, so things they do not understand should be looked up." "I would break the children into groups so I could pay careful attention to each of them." "Because if this is not grasped at an early age it is hard to catch up with it later in life." During the second administration, these responses were written: "If you don't understand and enjoy reading you never get good at it." "Many people area capable of reading, but understanding takes more thought." "Read everything correctly serves no purpose if one doesn't know what they've read." "You start out with simple sentences and then move on to more complex ones." Statements of "ultimate truth" used in the final round of responses to the questionnaire were: "I would use everyday things because it would be easy for them to pick up." "To be able to read, one must recognize letters and what sounds they make." "...Each child might learn better with a different tool." "Children need to learn about their language by using a variety of techniques in order to be good readers, writers, speakers, and listeners." These statements are made as if they are universal truth, agreed upon by everyone, with no need of defense or reference to authority.

Some respondents stated explicitly they responded from their background experience. Example from the first administration of the questionnaire: "I say that because that is what I have been taught and I believe it to be true." "This is how I was taught to read and I had very good experiences learning to read." "These were helpful when I was beginning to read." 2 out of 10 respondents referred to their background knowledge as their source of reasons for what they would do in classrooms, in the first administration of the questionnaire, responding consistently to more than one question in this way. One respondent was committed to not using materials like those used in his past experience. In the second administration of the questionnaire, preservice teachers continued to express reasons as being the way they were taught. An example is: "I say that because that's what I was always taught and I believe it to be true." This same students responded consistently on the first and second questionnaire. Another example from the second administration: "I would teach beginning reader's to read in small group settings, using charts and other visual aids to help them.. We would work on sounds and sounding out words. That's how I learned to read and I like that method." In the third administration of the questionnaire, this statement was recorded: "If I had not attended this class, I would probably teach from the old school of working alone, reading silently all of the time, and no time to share what you have read or written." Though no preservice teacher specifically used terms "this is the way I was taught", respondents who had previously used these terms showed no changes in materials or methods reported in previous responses to the instrument.

A final category which appeared throughout the questionnaire is the importance to the respondents of activities having meaning to the students. Previously discussed in the analysis of the question pertaining to respondents definition of a good reader, this idea emerged repeatedly. Examples of statements about meaning from the first set of questionnaires: "I'll do it this way, so it'll make more sense to the kids." ..."So they can understand the passage." ..."Because that would teach the word and help reinforce the meaning." From the second set of questionnaires came the following statements: ..."But they would understand the passage better." "Students could give input on what they think it means, and I could guide them to the correct meaning." "Use pictures because some students are visual learners and if they don't see it they do not understand what they are learning." These responses were recorded during the post-semester administration of the questionnaire: ..."Emphasize the meaning again because this would give the students a knowledge base of information." The following were recorded form the third administration of the instrument: "To understand a story, it is vital to understand what the unfamiliar words mean."

Conclusions and Implications

This study adds to the body of research pertaining to preconceptions preservice teachers bring to methods courses, with their lasting impact on beliefs about teaching. Through analysis of the autobiographies, all preservice teachers indicated they had learned to read through traditional methods of instruction emphasizing skills acquisition.

Students responses to many of the questions on the self-report survey indicated preservice teachers continuing beliefs about teaching as being skills oriented. In responses to questions about how to teach beginning reading, respondents repeatedly emphasized moving from the simple to the complex in small increments. When writing in response to questions about instruction in sound letter relationships, preservice teachers consistently mentioned going from letter-sounds to words, then to sentences. During the second round of responses, there were more statements of 'I don't know', or 'I'm not sure', indicating the respondents may be in cognitive conflict on this particular issue, and/or feeling comfortable stating an uncertainty, whereas during the novel experience of responding to a research questionnaire, they may have felt compelled to supply a response to each question. .

In responses to the question about how letter/sound relationships should be taught, preservice teachers' responses indicated an increased awareness of the need to make the knowledge of letter/sound relationships relevant to reading situations, with an increase in the identification of books as materials for these concepts. In all three administrations of the questionnaire, preservice teachers maintained emphasis on the importance of these concepts. Responses to the three administrations of the questionnaire illustrated students emphasis on skills in their approach to teaching this aspect of literacy.

A summary of the results of analysis of the question of how would preservice teachers instruct beginning readers to read, totals from the response group show[illegible] 13 respondents would use objects from the environment, 3 would teach the alphabet, 2 would

read to students, and 1 would put students in groups. The respondents who would teach the alphabet and put students in groups, showed no changes in methodology on this question through the different administrations of the questionnaire, while the remaining 6 showed changes in their beliefs about how to teach beginning readers. The change over the three administrations of the instrument was an increase in the variety of materials and methods for literacy instruction, and a decrease in the number of respondents who would teach letters first.

At the end of a semester of a methods course in reading, respondents are continuing to state "because that's how I learned in school", or use a statement of "ultimate truth" statement without giving a basis for the reality stated, as their reason for the teaching practices mentioned in response to questions. Requirements to read current research articles, class discussions about current research findings, and study of learning theory show little impact on the restructuring of cognitive concepts about the practice of teaching.

Students entered the course understanding the importance of meaning, and this was reinforced by the text and activities used in the course. In tracking the use of the key terms selected, i.e., 'understand' and 'comprehend', participants continued to consistently maintain use of the same term used in the first administration of the questionnaire. The analysis of these changes continued to show consistency in responses made to the open-ended questions. Consistency in the use of these terms demonstrated the initial summary

statement that the only changes noted in preservice teachers beliefs about teaching were on the knowledge level.

In summarizing the responses to the question about how would preservice teachers teach about letter/sound relationships, most respondents wrote about beginning with sounds, moving to words, then to sentences. The number of materials and methodologies which could be used increased with each administration of the questionnaire, demonstrating a change from knowledge of few types of materials to knowledge of many types of materials.

All respondents would preteach vocabulary.

In analyzing the changes in preservice teaches' beliefs facilitated by the course, students were able to respond with more materials and methods available through subsequent administrations of the instrument. Many students commented that the course surprised them in the number and variety of teaching materials and methodologies to which they were introduced. Their responses to the questionnaire, the artifacts constructed as course requirements, and journal responses to reading and class presentations verified the impact of awareness of a variety of materials. Education students would still use these new materials in traditional ways, highlighting the finding that changes occurred only at the knowledge level.

Responses to the questionnaire suggested changes to the wording of self-report instrument to facilitate additional details to responses. Attitudes toward both reading and writing were combined into one question. some of the respondents commented on their

attitudes about reading and failed to comment on their attitudes about writing. Discussions with preservice teachers and analysis of artifacts from the methods courses indicate preservice teachers have negative attitudes toward writing. Other researchers have written about the impact of negative attitudes toward writing on the teaching of written communication skills. Further research is needed about the impact of preservice teachers' attitudes on writing on their effectiveness in teaching written communication. In follow-up research, this question was broken up into two segments to encourage all respondents to respond with attitudes about both reading and writing.

The question about preteaching vocabulary before teaching a content subject has been modified to a more general question as to what the preservice teacher would do first. This modification would allow respondents to state other activities which might be used to introduce new content. The original question implied that vocabulary should be introduced first and asked respondents how this could be accomplished successfully.

Indicators of beginnings of changes to preconceptions about teaching were observed in the responses to the instrument and in course artifacts. One student began to mention discovery learning, moving from instruction being teacher centered to instruction becoming student centered. Increasingly preservice teachers included the use of literature for instruction in an increasing number of literacy strategies. Teacher educators understand that their philosophical orientation is demonstrated in their presentation of methods for approaches to instruction. Environments created in methods courses translate these orientations into teaching practices for prospective teachers(Burke, 1989). Allowing

instructors philosophical orientations to become models may facilitate changes in the philosophical orientations of preservice teachers.,

The category of reasons for responses which continued to emerge throughout the questionnaire was termed "universal truth", what Constance Weaver calls "Person on the Street" or "commonsense" model of reading. She says this assumption unquestioningly accepts the obvious--reading progresses from part to whole, from smallest unit, the letter, to largest unit (Weaver, 1988)

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